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RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUETIAA/DIRNSA FT GEORGE G MEADE MD
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DEPARTMENT FOR IO/T AND EAP/ANP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL AORC TBIO WHO NZ

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND RESPONSE TO SMALLPOX DEMARCHE

REF: A. STATE 71569

1B. WELLINGTON 362

11. (SBU) On May 9, Poloff conveyed Ref A points to Wendy Edgar, Acting Manager, International Sector Policy Directorate, Ministry of Health (see Ref B). In Edgar's response May 12, she reported that GNZ's "stance on variola virus is largely consistent with the U.S. position. We will be supporting retention of the variola virus for research purposes with the proviso that it is maintained in a safe environment. Our support for research into improved vaccine and antiviral drugs is contingent on the use of research methods that avoid the use of live variola virus, development of hybrid viruses, transport of variola DNA, and other such potentially hazardous laboratory practices."

12. (SBU) Edgar further provided the following related text from the delegation briefing notes: "The areas of permissible research sought by WHO's Variola Advisory Committee (VAC) include distribution of variola DNA between laboratories, and genetic engineering involving variola virus DNA and other orthopox viruses. This type of activity is not without risk.

Consideration of laboratory safety has been raised as a proposed resolution under pandemic preparedness (WHA 13.9) with regard to three SARS laboratory accidents in the past two years. New Zealand supports increased vigilance (sic) to laboratory safety. The WHO Director General appreciated the need for development of antiviral drugs and vaccines without using the live variola virus and recommended that the VAC reconsider research on variola viruses, in light of biosafety and biosecurity concerns, at its next meeting."

13. (SBU) Minister of Health Pete Hodgson will lead New Zealand's delegation to the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Edgar said. Deputy Director General of Public Health Don Matheson will lead the delegation after Hodgson departs. Chief Advisor of Public Health, Dr. Ashley Bloomfield, will also attend.
McCormick